

## Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 TUNIS 00211 131116Z

51

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 0211

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, EGEN, TS, US

SUBJ: US-TUNISIA JOINT COMMISSION

REF: TUNIS 0075

1. SUMMARY. AMBASSADOR DISCUSSED TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR TUNISIAN-AMERICAN JOINT COMMISSION WITH FOREIGN MINISTER CHATTI AND AGAIN WITH PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA. THREE OTHER GOT OFFICIALS CONCERNED WITH US-TUNISIAN RELATIONSHIP WERE ALSO APPROACHED. UNANIMOUS GOT VIEW EXPRESSED WAS THAT COMMISSION SHOULD COMPREHEND ALL EXISTING USG PROGRAMS IN TUNISIA, AS WELL AS TRADE AND INVESTMENT. ACCORDINGLY, EMBASSY REQUESTS DEPARTMENT RECONSIDER ITS PROPOSAL THAT JOINT COMMISSION'S MANDATE BE LIMITED ONLY TO TRADE AND INVESTMENT. IN ORDER TO FACILITATE FAVORABLE DECISION BY DEPARTMENT IN THIS REGARD EMBASSY WILL IN SEPARATE SPELL OUT IN DETAIL WHAT BROADLY-BASED JOINT COMMITTEE CAN AND MIGHT DO AND HOW IT CAN BE ADVANTAGEOUS TO US WITH MINIMUM OF EFFORT AND RISK. END SUMMARY.

2. ON JANUARY 11 I MET WITH FOREIGN MINISTER CHATTI TO EXAMINE IN PRELIMINARY FASHION TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR TUNISIAN-AMERICAN JOINT COMMISSION. I INDICATED THAT INASMUCH AS OUR ONGOING RELATIONSHIP IN SUCH KEY AREAS AS ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE IS ALREADY WELL-ESTABLISHED WE FELT THAT JOINT COMMISSION SHOULD FOCUS ON TRADE AND INVESTMENT. HERE THERE IS POTENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 TUNIS 00211 131116Z

FOR EXPANSION AND JOINT COMMISSION SESSIONS DEVOTED TO THIS

SUBJECT WOULD DEFINITELY BE FACILITATIVE. WHAT ARE TUNISIAN GOVERNMENT VIEWS REGARDING MAKEUP OF COMMISSION AND REGARDING WHAT IT IS DESIGNED TO ACCOMPLISH?

3. CHATTI REPLIED THAT WHILE TRADE AND INVESTMENT ARE IMPORTANT TO GOT, JOINT COMMISSION'S MANDATE MUST BE BROAD. IT SHOULD ENCOMPASS ALL AREAS OF OUR RELATIONSHIP, INCLUDING ECONOMIC AND MILITARY ASSISTANCE. WHEN IT MEETS IT SHOULD REVIEW RANGE OF TUNISIAN-AMERICAN BILATERAL RELATIONSHIPS. HE DID NOT REPT NOT VIEW COMMISSION AS DECISION-MAKING BODY. RATHER IN DISCUSSING ALL ASPECTS OF OUR ACTIVITIES IT WOULD MAKE SUGGESTIONS AND PROPOSALS. PROGRAMS FOR THE COMING YEAR COULD BE REVIEWED. GREAT ADVANTAGE OF COMMISSION FORUM OVER EXISTING RELATIONSHIPS WOULD BE THAT IT WOULD AFFORD OPPORTUNITY FOR ALL CONCERNED OFFICIALS TO BE CLUED IN ON WHAT IS GOING ON ACROSS THE BOARD. IT WOULD THUS IN LARGE PART BE EDUCATIVE AND IT WOULD HELP AVOID AND OVERCOME MISUNDERSTANDINGS.

4. I SAID VERY FRANKLY THAT ONE OF OUR CONCERNS IS THAT JOINT COMMISSION MIGHT BECOME NEEDLESSLY CUMBERSOME AND BUREAUCRATIC. ALSO I KNEW THAT SOME USG OFFICIALS ARE WORRIED THAT AT A TIME WHEN OUR ASSISTANCE RESOURCES ARE DWINDLING IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO MEET POSSIBLE GOT EXPECTATIONS OF INCREASED USG AID CREATED BY JOINT COMMISSION MEETINGS.

5. CHATTI SAID HE APPRECIATED THIS CONCERN BUT OBVIOUSLY JOINT COMMISSION WOULD NOT RPT NOT BE EXPECTED TO PERFORM MIRACLES. ESSENTIAL PURPOSE OF COMMISSION WOULD BE TO EXCHANGE IDEAS, CLARIFY ISSUES AND AGREE ON PROGRAMS. JOINT COMMISSION WOULD OFFER USG FORUM IN WHICH TO EXPLAIN DETAILS OF ITS ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS, INCLUDING PROBLEMS AND LIMITATIONS. HE SAID THAT GOT WANTED NO BUREAUCRATIZATION OF COMMISSION OPERATION. WHILE WITH OTHER COUNTRIES MAIN JOINT COMMISSION IS SUPPLEMENTED BY SUB-COMMISSIONS, HE COULD SEE THAT IN OUR CASE THIS WOULD NOT RPT NOT BE NECESSARY. OUR EXISTING BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP IN RELEVANT AREAS IS CLOSE ENOUGH TO OBTAIN THIS. WHAT WOULD BE DESIRABLE, HOWEVER, IS THAT BOTH SIDES PREPARE CAREFULLY FOR ANNUAL MEETING, HELD ALTERNATIVELY IN WASHINGTON AND TUNIS, SO THAT MEETING WOULD BE PRODUCTIVE.

6. WE HAVE HAD OPPORTUNITY IN LAST WEEK TO QUERY OTHER  
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 TUNIS 00211 131116Z

GOT OFFICIALS RE JOINT COMMISSION. I AGAIN ASKED PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA FOR HIS VIEWS WHEN I SAW HIM AT PALACE NEW YEAR'S RECEPTION JANUARY 7. HE REITERATED HIS EARLIER-EXPRESSED VIEW THAT COMMISSION SHOULD COVER BROAD SPECTRUM OF ACTIVITIES IN WHICH USG ENGAGED. FONMIN DIRECTOR OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION HAMED AMMAR TOLD DCM SAME THING ON JANUARY 11. HE BELIEVED JOINT COMMISSION WOULD DRAW UP A "BALANCE SHEET" OF YEAR JUST PASSED AND DISCUSS ACTIVITIES OVER COMING YEAR. AT ANNUAL MEETING EACH SIDE WOULD

PRESENT ITS IDEAS ON WHAT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE TO FURTHER BILATERAL RELATIONS, EXPLAINING RESOURCES AND CONSTRAINTS. COMMISSION WOULD ALSO SERVE AS A FORUM TO CLEAR UP MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND TO EDUCATE THE MEMBERS OF EACH SIDE ON THE WORKINGS OF THE TWO GOVERNMENTS.

7. BEN REJEB, HEAD OF AMERICAN DEVISION AT FONMIN, WAS ALSO APPROACHED IN COURSE OF WEEK, AS WAS BEN YAHIA, ASSISTANT TO AMMAR. THEIR RESPONSES WERE IDENTICAL:  
JOINT COMMISSION MUST CONCERN ITSELF WITH ALL EXISTING PROGRAMS, AS WELL AS FOCUSING ON AREA OF TRADE AND INVESTMENT. BEN REJEB ADDED THAT COMMISSION MIGHT ALSO EXAMINE WAYS IN WHICH TO ENCOURAGE MORE AMERICAN TOURISM TO TUNISIA.

8. COMMENT: GOT MESSAGE HAS COME THROUGH LOUD AND CLEAR: TUNISIANS EXPECT JOINT COMMISSION TO BE BROAD-GAUGED AND WOULD NOT RPT NOT BE SATISFIED WITH LIMITED MANDATE (STRICTLY TRADE AND INVESTMENT) PROPOSED IN PRELIMINARY FASHION BY DEPARTMENT. ACCORDINGLY, WE SUGGEST THAT DEPARTMENT REVIEW ITS PROPOSAL AND GIVE SERIOUS CONSIDERATION TO BROADENING JOINT COMMISSION'S MANDATE. IN ORDER TO FACILITATE A FAVORABLE DECISION BY DEPARTMENT IN THIS REGARD EMBASSY WILL BE SUBMITTING MESSAGE SPELLING OUT IN MORE DETAIL WHAT WE THINK BROAD JOINT COMMISSION CAN AND MIGHT DO AND HOW IT CAN BE ADVANTAGEOUS TOUS WITH A MINIMUM OF EFFORT AND RISK.  
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